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SUBJECT: GERMANY'S REACTION TO UNREST IN TIBET

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Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs
Jeffrey Rathke for reasons 1.4(b), (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On March 18, PolOff with Thomas Gerberich, the lead China desk officer at the German MFA, to discuss the latest developments in Tibet and the German response to the situation. Although German officials have said they oppose boycotting the Olympics to protest the Chinese government's heavy-handed response in Tibet, several prominent politicians have said the option should not be ruled out. Responses to the unrest in Tibet by German politicians reveal interesting domestic political dynamics as well. The Chinese continue to voice their opposition to a planned visit to Germany in May by the Dalai Lama, and have registered formal complaints alleging lapses in security by German authorities responsible for protecting Chinese diplomatic facilities here. Development Minister Wiegorek-Zeul announced March 20 that her ministry's planned May consultations with Chinese counterparts were on ice unless violence in Tibet stopped. Other diplomatic visits planned for this spring are still scheduled to go forward at this writing.

BOYCOTT COMMENTARY

¶2. (U) In a March 15 press statement, Chancellor Angela Merkel called on China to address the situation in Tibet through dialogue. Urging both sides to demonstrate restraint, she added that Germany opposes a boycott of the Olympics later this year. In an hour-long phone call the weekend of March 15 with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang, German Foreign Minister Steinmeier expressed Germany's deep concern about the violence and called on China to do all it can to avoid further escalation of the tensions and to ensure the greatest possible transparency.

¶3. (C) Gerberich reiterated to PolOff that the official position of the German government is to oppose a boycott of the Olympics at this point in time, a position which has been publicly articulated by Chancellor Merkel, Interior Minister Schaeuble, Foreign Minister Steinmeier, and other prominent politicians from within the grand coalition. Thomas Steg, a spokesman for the federal government said on March 17 that "a boycott would not change anything about the human rights situation for the people in Tibet, or for Tibetans in other Chinese provinces." On the other hand, several politicians (mainly from Merkel's CDU party, but

also from the coalition-partner Social Democrats and the opposition Greens) have publicly stated that a boycott should remain an option as a 'last resort' if the Chinese do not respond acceptably to the current situation in Tibet. The comments made on March 17 by Roland Koch (CDU), Hesse Minister-President (and long-time supporter of the Dalai Lama), summarize the general sentiment among those who might favor a boycott: "A boycott would lead China into isolation for many years. This is the last means that the international community can apply. However, we have not yet reached the point of last means. The Chinese leadership can end this discussion very quickly." Gerberich speculated that any moves toward a boycott may reveal more political divisions between the CDU and the SPD and suggested that the CDU would be more favorable toward the idea of a boycott than the SPD. He added the personal view that, if a boycott would need a "strong partner such as the U.S." behind it in order to be effective in influencing Chinese behavior.

POLITICAL MANEUVERING

¶4. (C) Noting that the Chinese government is "trapped in its own ideological thinking", Gerberich said "it would be a good sign" if the Chinese government let journalists in to report on developments in Tibet. (Note: the Chinese appear to be moving in the opposite direction, expelling from Tibet March 20 the two last remaining Western journalists, both affiliated with German media outlets. End note.) Moreover, Gerberich said, if the Chinese have the purported evidence to prove that the blame for the latest unrest is on the Tibetans' side, they should share

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this evidence publicly.

¶5. (C) According to Gerberich, in his weekend phone call with FM Yang, FM Steinmeier was trying to accomplish three things: 1) raise immediate concern about the situation on behalf of the German government; 2) leverage the recently-restored German-Chinese dialogue as a means of influence (reftel A); 3) demonstrate to a domestic German audience that Steinmeier is well positioned to respond to international crises... as part of his general effort to position himself as a possible SPD Chancellor candidate in next year's election. As Gerberich (please protect) commented privately, "everything has a domestic angle to it now."

¶6. (C) Development Minister Wiczorek-Zeul announced on March 19 that the Development Ministry's consultations (on renewable energy and climate change) with China, planned for the end of May, would be suspended until the violence in Tibet had ceased. Other planned visits by several senior German officials in the coming months (i.e., the Education Minister from April 13-18, the Interior Minister on April 29, and the Foreign Minister in June), as well as the visit to Munich by the Chinese Justice Minister April 21-22 for the rule of law dialogue, are all "still on" at this point, according to Gerberich. These or other senior visits could be cancelled as a sign of protest.

CHINESE COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE DALAI LAMA VISIT AND DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

¶7. (C) The planned visit to Germany by the Dalai Lama from May 15-19, at the invitation of the German Tibet Initiative, is also still expected to take place. The president of the German parliament plans to meet with the Dalai Lama when he visits Germany, a fact that the Chinese

have raised displeasure about.

¶8. (C) Tracking with reports in reftel B, the German Charge in Beijing was called into the Chinese Foreign Ministry twice in the past several days for a formal complaint about security of the Chinese embassy and consulates in Germany. According to Gerberich and other reports, protestors were able to enter the territory of both the Frankfurt and Munich consulates over the weekend and on March 17. In Frankfurt, protestors lowered the Chinese flag and raised the Tibetan flag. In Munich, protestors lowered the Chinese flag and burned it. There have been no incidents in Berlin, although there have been a number of protestors outside the Chinese embassy.

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